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# Spenser and Utopia

BY

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[Reprinted from *Studies in Philology*, xvii, 2, April, 1920.]





## SPENSER AND UTOPIA

BY MERRITT Y. HUGHES

The search for democratic foregleams in the Elizabethan poets has its allurements for those whose confidence in contemporary socialism and whose pleasure in the classics need mutual support. Mr. Albert H. Tolman studied Shakspeare from this angle in an article published just before the War and found that the author of *Coriolanus*, "If not the John the Baptist of democracy, was at least one of its prophets."<sup>1</sup> More recently Mr. Herbert Cory, in *Edmund Spenser, a Critical Study*, has pointed to the poet's use of St. George, a son of the soil or "male Cinderella," as evidence that he shared the English love for champions sprung of the people and belonged to the line of story-tellers who have given us Beowulf, Gareth, and Tom Jones. There are several ways in which a literature can be democratic. In bringing stalwarts like Sir Sattyane and Falconbridge onto their pages Spenser and Shakspeare were democrats, just as Ascham and Sir Thomas Elyot were democrats in enjoining archery as the most "commodious" exercise for young noblemen, but the poets would be surprised to find themselves classed in a line of prophets of which, presumably, Walt Whitman is the John Baptist if not the Messiah. The Red Cross Knight, as Mr. Cory tells us, relates the *Faerie Queene* to one of the enduringly popular elements in English poetry, but he also relates it to the spirit of a class not yet extinct in England which finds its play in riding to hounds and its earnest in voting the Conservative ticket. St. George's kinship with those jolly huntsmen is much less shadowy than his relation to the masses who are putting their sport into jeopardy in England.

Wiser and manlier than these efforts to find crumbs of the leaven of twentieth-century democracy in the Elizabethans is the revolt of Walt Whitman against the feudalism of Shakspeare, and of Keats against Spenser's uncompromising contempt for the mob in the passage of Book V in which the present article is interested. Whit-

<sup>1</sup> *Publications of the Modern Language Association*, xxix, pp. 277 sq.

man knows how irreconcilable is the war between him and his great predecessors, both in politics and art, and he declares it:

The great poems, Shakspeare included, are poisonous to the idea of the pride and dignity of the common people, the life-blood of democracy. Shakspeare seems to me of astral genius, first-class, entirely fit for feudalism—there is much in him ever offensive to democracy. He is not only the tally of feudalism, but I should say that Shakspeare is incarnated, uncompromising feudalism in Literature,—the democratic requirements are not only not fulfilled in the Shaksperian productions, but are insulted on every page.<sup>2</sup>

Keats, in a moment when his loyalty to Spenser wavered, threw in his lot with the wordy giant whom Talus overturned and rejoiced in the day when he had clothed himself in the name and power of Topography and could defy his enemies. Hazlitt threw down the gauntlet to Shakspeare's aristocratic prejudices and in doing so he pointed out a cleft between the sixteenth century and the nineteenth which it is probably more useful to explore than to cover over.

The sixteenth century had its democracy, but it was not of our kind. It was more thoroughgoing than ours. It recognized that men are all subject to the law of their nature and consequently owe each other a certain mutual respect which transcends all differences of rank. Spenser has plenty of glimpses of the humor and wisdom of this kind of democracy even in his aristocratic *Faerie Queene*. In Book III, Canto xi,

Kings, queenes, lords, ladies, knights, and damsels gent  
Are heaped together with the vulgar sort  
And mingled with the raskall rabblement,  
Without respect of person or of port,  
To show Dan Cupid's power and great effort.

The sixteenth century never lost sight of the common destiny of men, nor failed to recognize the obligation

. . . to love our brethren that were made  
Of that selfe mould and that selfe Maker's hand,  
That we, and to that same again shall fade,  
Where they shall have like heritage of land,  
However here on higher steps we stand,  
Which also were with selfe same price redeemed  
That we, however of us light esteemed.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Mr. Tolman, *ibid.*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>3</sup> *Hymne of Heavenly Love*, ll. 198-204.

The political and religious ideas of the Renaissance fixed a gulf between gentlemen and commons and denied the latter a share in the management of the society of which they were a part and forbade them to try or even to wish to better their state. Over against these restrictions it put a code of corresponding obligations upon the rulers. There was one law for people and another for king and nobles, but both were brought under the higher laws, political and religious, which were embodied in the ideas of the Commonwealth and the Church. To those laws all were alike slaves. "And say not you Princes," says North in his translation of Guevara, echoing the opinion of all Europe, "for that you are puyssant Princes, that you are excepted of servitude of menne. For without doubt it is a thyng more untollerable, to have their hearts burdened with thoughts than their necks with yrons." <sup>4</sup> The noblesse were no less servants to the Commonwealth than the tradesmen whom the 24th Chapter of the laws of Henry VIII condemned "as more regarding their own singular lucre and profit than the commonweal of the realm," or than the "sturdy vagabonds" condemned to "suffer pains and execution of death, as a felon and as an enemy of the commonwealth." <sup>5</sup> In the conception of the Commonwealth and of the Church, while they were living realities, there was a leveling principle more profound and quite as strong in its appeal to the popular imagination as there is in the Marxian creed. It is to these elements in Spenser and his contemporaries that we should turn for evidence of a democratic spirit rather than to passages where there is a fancied Tolstoian sympathy for laborers and simple men.

In the scene between Artegall, Talus, and the Giant in Book V of the *Faerie Queene* (Canto ii, stanzas 29-54), Spenser expressed the sixteenth century's sense of the separation of the classes and summed up the bitterness of the more than fifty years of struggle into which the religious and industrial changes of the time had thrown them, both in England and on the Continent. The poetry reaches one of its lowest levels in this passage and Spenser's opinions are nowhere more disappointing. Consequently most critics pass it hastily with a murmured apology. Miss Lillian Winstanley is almost alone in pausing over the passage, and she does so to excuse

<sup>4</sup> North's *Diall of Princes*, Bk. I, Cap. 29, Fol. 44.

<sup>5</sup> 24 of Henry VIII, re-enacted under Elizabeth.

or explain Spenser in the light of his Calvinistic theology. She writes:

This same kind of (Calvinistic) fatalism is the argument which Spenser brings against communism. Artegall meets a giant who wishes to level all things, and to distribute the goods of rich men among the poor. The knight . . . argues, not that such a course of procedure would be bad, but that the existing state of things is ordained and must not be tampered with. All things live and die as God has willed. He sets kings in sovereignty and he makes their subjects obey them; whatever is done is done by him; no one can withstand his will; what seems unjust cannot be called to account, for his counsel is past understanding.\*

Spenser's Calvinism alone is but a fragment of the explanation for the stanza which Miss Winstanley paraphrases and for the arch of ideas of which it is the keystone. Spenser's Calvinism is no more responsible for this canto than it is for the pageant of the Seven Deadly sins. Both passages were written consciously in the light of a host of earlier treatments of the same subject and in both Spenser spoke as the mouthpiece rather than the critic of the past. Catholic literature is as full of the divine right and necessity of the political order as the works of the reformers, and North's translation of the Bishop of Guevara's handbook of politics (translated from the French and published first in London in 1557) furnished later writers not only with much of their thought but with the conventional language and illustrations in which to clothe it. *The Diall of Princes* probably contributed as much or more than any other single source to the canto in which we are interested. North wrote:

When the Creator created the whole world, he gave to eche thing immediately his place; that is to wete, he placed intelligence, in the uppermost heaven; he placed the starres, in the firmament; the planettes, in the orbes; the byrdes, in the ayre; the erthe, on the center; the fyshes, in the water; the serpentes, in the holes: the beastes, in the mountaines: and al in generality he gave place to rest themselves in.

The passage suggests interesting neo-Platonic fictions woven into the traditional theological argument, and perhaps suggests why Spenser gives so much space in the context to his fine-spun reasoning, borrowed seemingly from "The Statesman," to prove that physical and human standards cannot be applied to the ordering of the commonwealth. If North was not responsible for Spenser's

\* *Modern Language Quarterly*, III (1900), p. 11.

marriage of Heathen philosophy and Christian theology in this canto, his connection with the language and thought of the passage is indisputable, and the connection is much readier than that with the Calvinistic dogmas learned in Cambridge days.

They live, they die, like as he doth ordaine,  
 Ne ever any asketh reason why.  
 The hils doe not the lowly dales disdaine;  
 The dales doe not the lofty hills envy.  
 He maketh kings to sit in sovereignty;  
 He maketh subjects to their power obey;  
 He pulleth downe, he setteth up on hy;  
 He gives to this, from that he takes away:  
 For all we have is his: what he list doe, he may.

For the true Calvinistic ring in this argument we must turn to old Sir John Cheke, who echoed it in his pamphlet against Ket's rebellion, written about 1550 and preserved in Holinshed (Vol. III, p. 1043). Here we meet not the submission to God's will of the Catholic Church of the Middle Ages, but the Protestant zeal for the glory of God. Cheke's most significant sentence is this:

God hath made the poore, and he hath made him to be poore that he might show his might: and set them aloft when he listeth, for such cause as to him seemeth, and pluck downe the rich to this state of povertie, as he disposeth to order them.

In writing so, Edward VI's tutor was, like Spenser, expressing ideas inherited from the past and embodying the conviction of the time, but, unlike Spenser, he was warping them into a narrow theological form. Behind both men was a long series of writers, both Catholic and Protestant, who had built up the conception of the state consisting of divinely sanctioned degrees shading from monarch to churl which was the political faith of the century. Elyot's *Booke of the Governour* is founded on the idea, and every political writer of the century expresses it. John Tyndall's *Book of the Obedience of a Christian Man* enunciated it in the first quarter of the century, and, if the chronicler is to be believed, won thereby the consent of Henry VIII that it should be taken off the index of heretical works. Even the leaders of the rebels in the Peasants' War did not dream of challenging the charmed principle of degree and authority,<sup>7</sup> and it was only the most extreme of the dema-

<sup>7</sup> "The Peasants' War," Belfort Bax, London, 1899, p. 65, sq.

gogues who appeared in England under the Protector Somerset who dared defy it, and they were always careful to "save the King's Majesty." It was never quite lost sight of in the social upheavals of the Reformation, either in Germany or England.

Perhaps the most typical form of the argument for the divine order of society reflected in the *Faerie Queene* is that found casually in the historians, in passages where they are not concerned with its proof but refer to it to illustrate or stress something else. So Holinshed uses it (Vol. III, p. 1570) to blacken the wickedness of the priests, and it is significant that it falls in his hands into the same mould that it takes in Spenser's stanza.

Wherein it is to be wondered at, what legion of devils possessed them that professing the name of christians, and linked with the society of Jesus, they should be so degenerate as to kicke against the rule of christianity, which teacheth that princes and potentates are to be obeied, specialle sovereigns and monarchs, who in their severall territories and dominions are like the sun, which is as king among the starres, the moone as queene, the egles among birds, the lion among beasts, the whale in the sea, the pike in pooles among fishes; finallie, as the heart in a living creature, which giveth life to the whole bodie, because it is the fountain of bloud and vitall spirits.

Of course, in this passage, the writer was interested in defending the Royal Supremacy, and he altered the traditional idea to suit his purpose, but he proves it by the traditional appeal to the order of the creation.

Spenser's views about "Justice distributive," as Elyot would call it, were a synthesis of the ideas of a host of writers, Catholic and Protestant, English and Continental. His introduction of them into the *Faerie Queene* is explained by the fact that they were challenged, both in books and action, in England and on the Continent, many times during the sixteenth century. Sir Thomas More was the first to challenge them in a book, the first of a series of socialist dreams clothed in a moral dignity and sublimated by a religious sanction which are strange to twentieth-century socialism, and which unveiled Utopia, where "all thynges being common," wonderful to relate, "everye man hath abundance of everye thinge." Englishmen before More had asked:

Is not this an unjust and unkinde publique weale, whych giveth great fees and rewardes to gentlemen, as they call them, and to goldsmythes, and to such other, whych be either ydle persones or else flatterers and devysers

of wayne pleasures: And of the contrarie part maketh no gentle provision for poore plowmen, coliarers, labourers, carters, yron-smythes, and carpenters: without whom no common wealths can continue.<sup>8</sup>

Many Englishmen of his time were agreed with More that it was impossible to "perceive aught but a certain conspiracy of riche men procuring their owne commodities under the name and title of the commen wealth," but he was the first seriously to suggest

... all things would reduce unto equality.

Communism was a more vivid and tempting idea to the sixteenth century than we can well understand in the twentieth. To us, if it is desirable at all, it is a far-off, divine event, the goal of an evolution of which our vacillating belief in progress is hardly strong enough to assure us. For us it has all the terrors of an experiment untried and lacking the sanction of authority. To the sixteenth century it was the acknowledged natural state of man, from which he had fallen after having once proved it, and to which it was God's will that he should strive, individually at least, to be worthy to return. The newly explored mythology confirmed the Christian belief in a past age of gold. You might read of it authentically in any author. North gave a chapter to "the golden age in times past and the worldly miseries which we have at this present" (*Diall of Princes*, Bk. I, Cap. xxi), and he developed the idea in a fashion which recalls the Renaissance treatment of classical Arcadian material on one hand, and on the other, the hard-headed British socialism of the men who had preached reform in England since the days when John Ball went about demanding,

When Adam delved and Eve span,  
Who was then the gentleman?

North opens his chapter with a confident picture of primitive happiness:

In the first age and golden world, al lived in peace, eche man toke care for his owne landes, every one planted and sowed their trees and corne, and every one gathered his frutes, and cut his vynes, kned their bred, and brought up their children, and finally all lived by their owne proper swette and travaile, so that all lived without the prejudice and hurt of any other.

Spenser looked back to the golden age with the spirit both of an

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<sup>8</sup> More, *Utopia*, p. 159.

unquestioning Christian and a Renaissance scholar, and it served him as the architectonic idea of Book Five. Artegall is Astraea's emissary to restore the age of Saturn, from which the Book takes its departure:

For during Saturnes ancient raigne it's sayd  
That all the world with goodnesse did abound:  
All loved vertue, no man was afrayd  
Of force, ne fraud in wight was to be found:  
No warre was knowne, no dreadfull trumpet's sound,  
Peace universall rayn'd mongst men and beasts,  
And all things freely grew out of the ground:  
Justice sat high ador'd with solemne feasts,  
And to all people did divide her dread beheasts.

From this happy state men were believed to have declined because of their wickedness and its primal curse, and it was natural that the great religious excitement of the century should give many a hope that the gate into that lost Eden was about to reopen.<sup>9</sup>

The hope of regaining the Eden of equality of goods and privileges was certain to become a revolutionary force in society if there were proper economic provocation united with a high degree of religious fanaticism. The conditions were fulfilled in south Germany and Tyrol in 1525 when the Peasants' War began. The direct effects of that tragic outbreak cannot have been very great in England, although Elizabeth's anxiety to keep the realm clear of Anabaptists throughout her reign leaves no doubt that fear of them and their ideas was a *bête noir* of the governing classes. They were the Bolsheviks of their time. The chroniclers, Camden and Holinshed, mention their doings in Amsterdam and in the German cities with a morbid interest contrasting sharply with their usual indifference to events abroad, and they mention the series of severe edicts of expulsion against them which began in 1560 as the most salutary and timely of the Queen's laws. The bands of

<sup>9</sup> *The Diall of Princes* is full of speculations on the loss of man's natural state of communism. Bk. I, Cap. 30, explains property and "lordship" as results of Noah's tyranny over his sons, or of the revolt of the five kings against Chedor Laomer. This seems to represent a general idea that the cause was an event subsequent to the original "Fall," and that the misfortune might therefore be repaired and that men might return to the state in which "all were equal in commaunding, and none greater than other in possessions." (Cap. 28.)

German peasants who were disappointed in Luther's pure evangely of faith, and who threw in their lot with the newer gospel of love and brotherly equality which found expresion in the famous Twelve Articles, were one of the most amiable and dreadful swarms of ignorant idealists who have threatened society. Their excesses in Münster and their bloody punishment made an impression on the imagination of Europe which was not forgotten for a century. While the obloquy of their destruction in the Peasants' War branded their simple faith in community of goods and a world where there would be neither usury nor taxation as a vulgar sophistry, their martyrdom did not fail entirely to make an impression. International movements of the proletariat were slower and more difficult in the sixteenth century than they are today, and it is hard to tell how far the communistic ideas of the English rebels of the middle of that century in England were inspired by the memory of the Peasants' War. The recurrence of a similar outbreak in England was averted probably only because the religious instincts of the mob were not seriously stirred in its sporadic attempts at social revolution. It was the misfortune of most of the risings in England under Henry VIII and Edward VI to be related to the waning forces of religious reaction. From Catholicism, as well as from the Queen's *via media* in religion, the spirit of revolution could get no support, and the political overturn following the Reformation in England was postponed for a hundred years. When the English revolution came the discontent and "class-consciousness" of the lower classes, which had been so strong in Spenser's boyhood, had faded, and the changes wrought by the Commonwealth had very little social significance. If the storm had broken when the memory of the Peasants' War was fresh the result would have been different. From the suppression of the Family of Love in Münster until after the publication of the *Faerie Queene* men shuddered at the thought of communism. The mind of Europe was caught on a dilemma. It must be either the preservation of the existing order of society sanctioned by history and by the authority of the Bible, or the levelling down of all distinctions of rank and property; either "degree" or "equality." The imagination of the time could discover no third course.

At the time of Spenser's birth this dilemma had been for three years the most pressing public question in England. Under Henry VIII the objects of the scattered revolts had always professed to

be "onelic the defence and maintenaunce of the faith of Christ, and deliverance of holie Church, sore decaied and oppressed," and little had been said of the "furtherance of private as well as public matters in the realme, touching the wealth of the king's poore subjects."<sup>10</sup> Under Edward VI the series of disturbances which reached their climax in Ket's revolt in 1549 lost their conservative religious cast and became social-revolutionary. They were the protest of the poor against the "Enclosures" of the farms and commons by the landed gentry who found sheep-raising more profitable than the feudal dues paid by their tenants. The enclosures were a betrayal of the duties owed to the common-wealth, as the sixteenth century understood it, and they were a declaration of war on the commons by the gentles. The preambles to the laws against enclosures beginning in Henry's reign recognized the justice of the complaint of the villeins against their lords, and the language of the statutes made by the Protector Somerset almost excuses the worst violence of the peasants' efforts to redress themselves. The pulpit was on the side of the poor tenants, and Latimer led the way in sermons which must have aroused the bitterest class-feeling. Strype preserves some fragments of them in a passage where he describes with his usual warmth the decay of the towns, the expulsion of the abbey-tenantry, and the misery of the poor at whose expense the clergy and nobles wantoned in luxury. An extract like the following is an interesting light on the state of England's social conscience in 1548.

Rich men were never so much estranged from Pity and Compassion towards the poor People, as they be at this present Time. They devour the People as it were a Morsel of Bread. . . . If the poor Man will not satisfy their covetous Desires, he is sure to be molested, troubled, and disquieted in such Sort, that whether he will or not, he shall forego (his land), or else it were as good for him to live among the Furies of Hell as to dwell by those rich Carles and covertous Churles.<sup>11</sup>

After this it was natural that Ket's followers in 1549 should chiefly declare a spitefull rancour and hatred conceived against all gentlemen, whom they maliciouslie accused of inordinat covetousness, pride, rapine, extortion, oppression, practiced against their tenants and other, for which they accounted them worthie of all punishment.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Holinshed, Vol. III, p. 942.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by Strype, *Memorials Ecclesiastical*, Vol. II, p. 150.

<sup>12</sup> Holinshed, Vol. III, p. 1028.

Ket sat under the Reformation Tree on Mousehold Heath with a swarming army of 20,000 countrymen around him and tried the captive gentlemen by scores. The peasants cried out for "their hanging, although they could yeeld no reason, but that they were gentlemen and therefore not worthie to live."<sup>13</sup> It was the dawn of a new social justice, and the mob around Ket grew every hour in the expectation that he would fulfill the promise of Spenser's Giant:

Tyrants that make men subject to their law,  
I will suppress, that they no more may raine;  
And lordings curbe, that commons over-aw:  
And all the wealth of rich men to the poore will draw.<sup>14</sup>

Blind hatred of "gentlemen" and radical doctrinaire socialism marked the disturbances which were still fresh in men's memories when Spenser was a child. Of the class-hatred the illustrative passages which have been given might be multiplied a hundred times. There is less direct evidence of the communism of these movements for they did not leave a manifesto like the Twelve Articles of the Bauernkrieg, and indeed, the surviving proclamations issued by the rebels in 1549 recognize the authority of the King and say nothing about a socialist commonwealth, although they are very clear on the score of the gentlemen. For evidence that the peasants had a communistic object we must turn to contemporary historians and to the pamphlets which their rebellion called forth. These leave no doubt that the obvious solution of economic injustices which communism seems to offer made as strong an appeal to the revolutionists of the sixteenth century as it does in Russia at present. The dry pages of Cheke and Holinshed arouse themselves to righteous indignation against a social sophistry which Spenser satirized in one of the first of his poems, *Mother Hubberds Tale*. The Foxe is reasoning with the Ape:

Sithe then we are free borne,  
Let us all servile base subjection scorne:  
And as we bee sonnes of the world so wide,  
Let us our fathers heritage divide,  
And challenge to ourselves our portions dew  
Of all the patrimonie, which a few  
Now hold in hugger mugger in their hand,

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<sup>13</sup> Holinshed, Vol. III, p. 1031.

<sup>14</sup> *Faerie Queene*, Bk. v, ii, 38.

And all the rest doo rob of good and land.  
 For now a few have all, and all have nought,  
 Yet all be brethren ylike dearly bought.  
 There is no right in this partition,  
 Ne was it so by institution  
 Ordained first, ne by the law of Nature,  
 But that she gave like blessing to each creature,  
 As well of worldly livelode as of life,  
 That there might be no difference nor strife,  
 Nor aught called mine or thine: thrice happie then  
 Was the condition of mortall men  
 That was the golden age of Saturne old.

*Mother Hubberds Tale* and the second canto of Book Five of the *Faerie Queene* are at the hither end of a line of political tracts issued against the seditionists of Edward VI's reign and their doctrines. The most important of these was Sir John Cheke's "The Hurt of Sedition, how grievous it is to a Commonwealth" or "The True Subject to the Rebel," which appeared about 1550 and is preserved entire on the pages of Holinshed and in part in Strype's *Memorials*. The disturbances died down with Elizabeth's accession and the subject passed from pamphlets into literature. Sidney introduces us to it in the fifth chapter of the *Arcadia*, when Kalendar hears that his son has been captured in battle by the Helots and

that the hate of those paysaunts conceived against all Gentlemen was suche, that everye houre hee was to looke for nothing but some cruell death: which hetherunto had onely beene delayed by the Captaines vehement dealing for him.

Presently the rebels make their captive, Pyrochles, their captain, "God wott, little prowde of that dignitie," for noble blood and noble rank cannot remain long separated with Sidney. In Book II of the *Arcadia* he resumes the subject of the peasant revolt and tells a story which resembles Spenser's account in the Fifth Book of the *Faerie Queene* in the contempt he shows for the common people, and in their easy defeat by Zelmane, Basilius, and Dorus, who makes a great slaughter among them with a sheep-hook, as Talus does with his flail in the later version of the story. There is more realism in Sidney's fight than there is in Spenser's, and the savage joke of the painter who lost his hands in the fray is unlike the spirit of Spenser in the *Faerie Queene* although it has parallels enough in the "Present State of Ireland."

Sidney's cynical account of the confused objects of his rebel peasants shows that he was thinking of recent events in England and on the Continent, and also that his mind was full of classical treatments of such scenes as he was painting. Homer's mobs like swarms of bees and Agrippa's Fable were in his thoughts. He wrote:

. . . when they began to talke of their grieves, never Bees made such a confused humming: the towne dwellers demanding putting downe of imposts: the country felowes laying out of common . . . Al cried out to have new councellors: but when they should think of any new, they liked them as well as any other, that they could remember, especially they would have the treasure so looked unto, as that he should never neede to take any more subsudies. At length they fell to direct contrarieties. For the Artisans, they would have Corne and Wine set at a lower price, and bound to be kept so still: the plowmen, vine-laborers, and farmers would none of that. The countrimen demanded that every man might be free in the chief townes: that could not the Burgesses like of. The peasants would have the Gentlemen destroyed, the Citizens (especially such as Cookes, Barbers, and those that lived most on Gentlemen) would but have them reformed.<sup>15</sup>

Spenser was only following suit when he wrote:

Therefore the vulgar did about him flocke,  
And cluster thicke unto his leasing vaine,  
Like foolish flies about an hony crocke,  
In hope by him great benefite to gaine,  
And uncontrolled freedome to obtaine.

The relation between Spenser's ideas in Book Five of the *Faerie Queene* and the mass of floating conservative opinion about the social order which is reflected in the books of Elyot, Tyndall, North, Cheke, and Sidney which have been mentioned illustrates the extent to which he was indebted in this passage, as he was in all that he wrote, to the spirit of his time and to literary traditions of the past. He was not speaking merely as a Calvinist, although it happened that Calvin, and, for that matter, Luther too, professed the same political principles and exerted themselves in their defence. At heart in this, as in some other passages, Spenser was really closer to the Roman faith which he abhorred than he was to the Protestantism which he professed.

The second canto of Book Five is a partisan pamphlet. It tells only one side of the dispute between gentles and commons. For

<sup>15</sup> *Arcadia*, p. 217.

the other side we must turn to the old historians and divines. Spenser's choice of sides, and his introduction of this material into the poem, leave no doubt of his feeling toward democracy as we understand it today. Whitman's "dignity of the common people" would have been unthinkable to him. The modern conception of the betterment and self-expression of the people collectively would have aroused his scorn and the idea that they should participate in government would have stirred his laughter. His mind was, as Mr. Cory has put it, conservative and "institutional." He was an aristocrat, and he reserved the worst vials of his wrath, as Shakspeare did for the demagogues, Brutus and Sicinius, in *Coriolanus*, for Utopian ideals and idealists. Spenser showed himself democratic in recognizing that gentle virtues sometimes spring in vulgar soil; and in keeping his eye steadily upon the essential human equality from which differences in blood and rank cannot emancipate; but for democracy and for socialism in any of its varieties he took more particular pains than any other Elizabethan writer to let us know that he entertained no sympathy at all.

With this conclusion the paper properly ends, but it may be of interest to suggest a possible definite historical allegory in the story of the Giant whom Artegall overthrows. It lies in the rebellion already mentioned which had its centre in Norwich in 1549. The parallel between the events at Norwich and those at Münster, which have been pointed to as likely to have been in Spenser's eye, is close enough in a general way to let either serve as inspiration for the passage. Probably Spenser was writing without a very definite slant on history. The rebels in 1549, like those in the *Faerie Queene*, were led by a specious man of straw, John Ket, who promised a Utopian reformation. Ket, like the Giant, was overthrown at the very beginning of the armed struggle, but only after a long and formal debate with the representative of authority, and his people were cut to pieces in a terrible slaughter by a large force of Swiss and Italians. Holinshed writes that "Norreie, king at armes," offered the Marquis of Northampton's pardon to the rebels in the city and pleaded with them to adopt sane counsels. A man named Flotman came forward as their herald and

utterlie refused the kings pardon, and told Norreie certeinly that they would either restore the Common-wealth from decaie, into which it was fallen, being oppressed through the covetousnesse and tyrannie of the gentlemen: either else would they like men die in the quarrell.

Then the mercenaries were set upon them and they died, but hardly like men, if the chronicler is to be trusted.

The parallel between the foreign troops and Talus is on the surface. The Iron Man embodied Spenser's memories of the little bands of English men-at-arms in Ireland but he also represented the avengers of lawlessness universally. Ultimately, perhaps, he typifies the violence with which nature rights the gross wrongs of history. In a passage discussing the fancy and the imagination Coleridge mentions Talus as an example of Spenser's poetic powers at their best. He writes:

He has an imaginative fancy, but he has not imagination, in kind or degree, as Shakspeare or Marlowe have; the boldest effort of his powers in this way is the character of Talus.

De Vere and DeSelincourt have written of Talus in a similar spirit of praise. DeSelincourt says:

By his (Artegall's) side he sets Talus, the iron man, the most powerful embodiment of Justice in the abstract. In Sir Artegall and his remorseless squire the different types of allegory are seen at once in their best contrast and in perfect harmony.

Talus is undoubtedly one of the most satisfactory inventions in the whole allegory. He is more convincing and significant than any of the other companions of the Knights errant except Una, and he probably stood very definitely for the iron soldiers who avenged the cause of Justice in Spenser's time and for the principle which lay behind their existence in society. He answered also to a sense of fitness which we still feel in these matters and which North phrased definitely for his age in a passage in the "Diall":

We ordeine and commaund, that the prince do not onely not kill with his hands, but also that he doo not see them do justice with his eyes. For how much noble and worthie a thing it is, before the presence of a prince, that all should receive honour: so selanderous a thing it is that any in his presence should loose their lyves.

*Boston University.*

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